97-84200-15

Wellock, Wilfred

"Patriots"

London

[ca. 1920?]

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              Cont:       GPub:       Fict:  1    Indx:  0
  Desc:  a    Ills:       Fest:  0    DtSt:  q    Dates: 1920,1929 ↔
- 1  040     PR1 ▾c PR1 ↔
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- 3  007     h ▾b d ▾d a ▾e f ▾f a--- ▾g b ▾h a ▾i a ▾j p ↔
- 4  007     h ▾b d ▾d a ▾e f ▾f a--- ▾g b ▾h a ▾i b ▾j p ↔
- 5  049     PR1A ↔
- 6  100 1   Wellock, Wilfred, ▾d 1879-1972. ↔
- 7  245 10  "Patriots" ▾h [microform] : ▾b a play in one act / ▾c by Wilfred
Willock. ↔
- 8  260     London : ▾b To be obtained from the I.L.P. Book Dept., ▾c [ca.
1920?] ↔
- 9  300     22 p. ; ▾c 22 cm. ↔
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TECHNICAL MICROFORM DATA

FILM SIZE: 35mm REDUCTION RATIO: 11:1 IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA (IIA) IB IIB

DATE FILMED: 9-29-97 INITIALS: PB

TRACKING # : 28161

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22

"PATRIOTS"

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By Wilfred Wellock

308
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Box 815

TO BE OBTAINED FROM THE
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PRICE FOURPENCE

"PATRIOTS"

By WILFRED WELLOCK.

Dramatis Personae :

—

Mrs. SELDON, –	A War Widow.
GEORGE– – –	Her Son, aged 19.
ADA – – –	Her Daughter, aged 9.
Sir HORACE BLENKINS.	
THOMAS SLINGSBY	A Company Promoter.
The Rev. Mr. MELSOP.	
A STRANGER.	
A NEWSBOY.	
A MAID SERVANT.	

NOTE.—The names of the characters in this play are entirely fictitious and do not refer to any living person.

"PATRIOTS"

Scenes I. and IV. : *Mrs. Seldon's Cottage.*
Scenes II. and V. : *Sir Horace Blenkins' Drawing Room.*
Scene III. : *A Street.*

SCENE I.

Mrs. Seldon's Cottage. Furnished in usual style of workmen's cottages. Everything rather cheap, but well kept. General aspect bright and cheerful. A table stands in the middle of the room. Mrs. Seldon is sewing, sitting in a rocking chair by the table, on which are sewing materials. Ada, her daughter, is sitting on a stool by the fire, reading.

After a pause Ada looks up, then speaks.
Ada : Do you think George will get that job, mother ?
Mother : I don't know, child ; why do you ask ?
Ada : If he does, happen I'll get a new frock at the Feast ?
Mother : Happen ! We'll see.
Ada resumes her reading. After a short pause :
Ada : Helen Fawcett is having a new hat at Whitsun.
Mother : Are you sure ? Her father is out of work.
Ada : Oh, yes. It's going to have some pink silk on.
Mother : Fancy !
Ada : If George gets the job will he get a lot of money, mother ?
Mother : Not so much for a while, I'm afraid.

Ada : Amy Morrison's father must get a lot of money, mustn't he ?

Mother : Yes, I daresay he does.

Ada : Why do some people get a lot of money, mother ? and others only a little ?

Mother : I don't think I know. I suppose some work is more important than others.

Ada : Can't George do important work ?

Mother : I'm sure he could if he got the chance, for he really is clever.

Ada : Why doesn't he get the chance ?

Mother : There are always so many after the good jobs.

Ada : Oh, mother, I wish there weren't so many clever people ; don't you ?

Mother : It does rather look as if there were too many, to be sure.

Ada : The teacher at the Sunday School says that God has work for everyone.

Mother : Yes.

Ada : Hasn't He work for George ?

Mother : He has, I think. But there's something wrong with the world.

Enter George.

His manner is evasive, his face betrays his condition. Disgust and despair are revealed in his every movement. He throws his cap upon the table, and sits down mutely at the back of the room. At first sight of her son, Mrs. Seldon's face darkens, for the moment words fail her.

Ada : Did you get the job, George ?

No answer.

Ada : George ?

George : What chance has a fellow when there are hundreds after it ?

Mother : Who got it ?

George : I don't know. The hungriest, I suppose. A rascal of a fellow sat there and asked each man the lowest wage he would take. His hard face and cold eyes sent one's heart into one's shoes. My God ! That chap roused the devil in me, mother.

Mother : Never mind, my lad, you've done your best. We'll just have to make the most of what we have, and go on as long as we can. There'll be some way done.

George : We've been going on like that for the last eighteen months !

Mother : Yes, I know, it's very hard.

George : Hard ! I wouldn't mind it being hard, if it were human. But it's inhuman. We're treated worse than dogs. At the very best we are only regarded as animals. Look at me ! I've to prowl round the town all day long seeking whom or what I may devour. Why, mother, w'ere worse than barbarians : civilisation is a huge pretence. What am I allowed to do that's civilised ? I eat bread and margarine two or three times a day, seek work, and otherwise slink about for the most of my time. I have no money, and my mind is haunted by fear and consumed by hatred and disgust. Far better go into the jungle outright, and have done with it. In fact, that's what I've decided to do !

Mother : What do you mean, George ?

George (after a moment's silence) : I've 'listed.

Mother : What ? You've 'listed ? You're goin' for a soldier ? (*No answer.*) Good Lord deliver us ! Goin' for a soldier ! (*Covers her face with her hands.*) My God ! My God ! (*Moans.*) George, George, whatever have you been thinking about ? It isn't really too late, is it ?

George : I've been thinking a good deal lately, mother.

Mother (half dazed.) : Goin' for a soldier ! My George goin' for a soldier !

George : You know I don't want to go, mother ; but I'm not going to sponge on you any longer.

Mother : You are not sponging on me. Everything I have is yours ; it has never been otherwise. Besides, you get the dole.

George : The dole doesn't keep me. And when I'm not on the dole, what then ?

Mother : But you know I keep you gladly, and have never once complained.

George : Of course I do. That's the trouble. It's your long-suffering which pains me. You endure too much for my sake, and I cannot bear it any longer. Fancy, a strong healthy lad, 19 years of age, having to sponge on his mother ! No, I can't stand it, mother ! But why it should be, baffles me. I've got brains, and energy, and I long to do things ; but nobody'll let me, give me a chance. Yet you've only to open your eyes to see that there's lots to be done. Who's to blame ? Is it the Government ? If it is, it's time they were demolished, that's all I've got to say.

Mother : But how are you going to help matters by becoming a soldier ? If the Government is at fault, why go and serve it ?

George : I don't know, mother. I expect I'm mad. But, at least, there'll be some pretence that we are doing something

useful ; and that will be worth something. Besides, I shall see things. Here it is all poverty and vacancy, one perpetual run of sordidness. And I'm tired of it. (*A pause.*)

Mother (softly.) : George, you know what it is a soldier's business to do ?

George : Oh, I've thought about all that. But you needn't worry on that score ; I shall never kill anybody, don't imagine !

Mother : But your father, George ! If he should know what you have done, it will be insufferable torture to him. Is it possible you have forgotten his last words, his very last letter from France ? Never ! Never !

George : I was only young then ; I didn't know what it was all about. Why did he go ?

Mother : He was Conscripted ! But he regretted, afterwards, not having defied the law. When he had seen what the war was, and learned something of what it all meant, he vowed that no boy of his should ever pass through what he had been compelled to pass through. Time after time, on his last leave he said : That boy shall be brought up never to have anything to do with war ; and in every letter afterwards he said the same thing. Oh, George, you do not understand. You do not see what I have done. I have betrayed my trust, the trust your father gave to me. Oh, it is terrible ! I am disgraced ! You are disgraced ! We are all disgraced together !

George : Nonsense, mother. When father learns all he will not blame you ; he will blame those who have driven us to it. As for me, was I not disgraced already ? My humanity is disgraced every day I walk the streets idle.

Mother : No, you do not understand. You have consented to kill your brother, and killing is murder—murder, George, murder !

George : As to that, aren't we all being killed, murdered daily, body and soul, by idleness and starvation ?

Mother : Then, God be merciful to those who are doing it ! I wouldn't have their lot for all the wealth of England. Better be murdered than a murderer.

(*She goes to a box in a corner of the room, takes out a letter and reads. Presently she looks up.*)

Mother : George, forgive me. It is I who am to blame. I ought to have explained to you sooner, but I thought it wicked to acquaint one so young with such ghastly horrors. Is it too cruel to tell you now ? No, it cannot be ; you must know. Listen ! (*She reads.*) " Edith, my soul cries aloud : can you, can no one save us from this hell ? " All his last letters were like that. (*Continues reading.*) " Our humanity revolts, cries out

against the devilry to which we are subjecting it. But no one heeds ; no one hears. We have destroyed our souls, torn out our hearts, and become ghouls. We are murderers, murderers, ghastly murderers, every one, incarnations of the fiends of hell. Day after day we are brought to this devilish work, mere flesh and blood, remnants of our former selves, our souls dead within us. Even the flesh will not endure it much longer. It will kill me. I shall never return ; nay, I dare not return, for without my soul you would not know me. One charge I leave you : it is that you shall teach George what war is and means ; that you shall save him from becoming dehumanised as his father has become dehumanised. If it should be that he must give his life for his fellows, or for a great cause, then let him give it freely and manfully, and in the possession of his soul. I know that this war is evil at the core, because it asks of us that which no man ought to be asked to forfeit. Preserve George from this hell, and you will earn the eternal gratitude of your old. . . " Oh, my God ; what shall I do ? (*She bursts into sobbing. Ada goes to her side, and puts her arm around her neck.*)

Ada : Mother ! Don't cry, mother ; he won't go. I won't let him. (*She runs across to her brother, half jumps on his knee, and embraces him.*)

Ada : You won't go away, will you, George ? You won't go away and leave mother and me ?

Curtain.

SCENE II.

Some months later.

Scene—*The residence of Sir Horace Blenkins, a corner of the drawing-room. Antique furniture, oil paintings and gilded mirrors on the walls. An elaborate candelabra is just visible. Sir Horace Blenkins is standing near a little table, holding a letter. He is meditating.*

Sir Horace : I wonder what's in the wind. A terrible fellow, Slingsby. But it's of no use worrying, and Slingsby doesn't usually mince matters. Still, it's just as well to know what's afoot. These Company promoters are devils of fellows, and they don't ask for interviews just for fun. And the worst of it is, I'm a bit green on financial matters, and can easily be taken in. But even the devil must have his due, and there's no denying that Slingsby has put a few good things in my way of late. At the same time, there have been some frightful smashes up, and exposures recently. One must be careful. A single slip and one's whole life is a heap of ruins. I must confess that Slingsby has removed a horrible old skeleton from my cupboard, but, bless my soul, if I don't sometimes think that a more horrible one may jump in its place. Well, he'll be here in a moment, and he'll want to know at once what I think about his new Company. But I don't think anything about it, and I shall tell him so. These d——d Company promoters can make anything show up well on paper, these days. Ah, I hear footsteps.

A knock. Servant enters.

Servant : Mr. Slingsby, sir.

Sir Horace : Show him in. Oh, here you are. How are you ?

Slingsby : Topping ! Bound to be, you know. And you ?

Sir Horace : Nicely, thanks.

Slingsby : What did you think of the Kubic dividend last week ? Fine, wasn't it ?

Sir Horace : Very good ; very good !

Slingsby : I should think so ! I was afraid you might be off to the Riviera on the strength of it. But this other thing is even better.

Sir Horace : Ha, ha ! The same old story.

Slingsby : No, no ! Joking aside, it's the surest thing I've touched for years.

Sir Horace : Really ?

Slingsby : Without any doubt, in all seriousness. If it comes off, it's a veritable gold mine.

Sir Horace : What do you mean by saying : If it comes off ?

Slingsby : Just this : the oil is there, one of the richest fields in the whole world. But to insure the venture we must have possession.

Sir Horace : Is it really necessary ? Couldn't you bargain with the natives ?

Slingsby : Not in this case ; no ! It is absolutely imperative that we have possession. The very attempt to bargain will mean that we shall lose some of the richest cream of the venture.

Sir Horace : That, Slingsby, is a huge undertaking, and I should be inclined to say an impossible one. Why, apart from the act of taking possession, you've all the diplomatic difficulties to overcome at this end.

Slingsby : What would you say if I were to tell you that the latter are nearly overcome already ?

Sir Horace : You don't mean it ?

Slingsby nods.

Sir Horace : How have you managed it ? Who's behind the venture ?

Slingsby : At this stage, I cannot tell you.

Sir Horace : What are you waiting for ? What's the next step ?

Slingsby : We are now waiting for you and one or two more to come in. It's no good beating about the bush, Sir Horace. We simply want you in. Give your consent, put down fifty thousand, or so, and I'll wager you'll be a millionaire inside seven years !

Sir Horace : No, no, Slingsby. That's too rosy altogether.

Slingsby : I know it sounds too good to be true. But it is as certain and as clear as daylight. It's just a case of two and two.

Sir Horace : But you've said nothing about the natives. They're entitled to some consideration, you know.

Slingsby : And they'll get it. We'll treat them properly, providing we get control. Besides, of what use is oil to them ?

Sir Horace : They can sell it, can't they —just as we propose to do ?

Slingsby : They don't even know its value, not to speak of getting, purifying, storing and transporting it.

Sir Horace : But it doesn't take long to learn these things, and you certainly cannot deny that the oil is theirs. Then you must remember that the backward races are waking up.

Slingsby : That is no doubt true. But we are hoping to get this business settled before such an event takes place in that particular region.

Sir Horace : How much territory do you propose to take in ?

Slingsby : The greater part of Marrigoldland is reported to be very rich in oil. And, of course, while you are at it, you may as well do the thing properly.

Sir Horace : I don't know. I am not at all happy about the matter. You see, Slingsby, our people at home are much more alive to this kind of thing than they used to be. Twenty years ago, or even ten, it would have been possible.

Slingsby : Bah, Sir Horace, you idealise. The British public is a pretty stodgy mass, I assure you. It wakens up once in a while, but it soon falls asleep again, settles down and forgets.

Sir Horace : Ah, but the war has opened its eyes, made it more sensitive.

Slingsby : There you are wrong. On the contrary, it has dulled its sensibility. Just observe ! What occurs the moment someone tries to kick up a little dust over something or other ? Why, the people turn away from it, weary. They are too morally tired out, too stupified by continued wretchedness to take much notice of anything.

Sir Horace : Even if what you say be true, it isn't particularly encouraging, do you think ? After all, the morality of an issue doesn't depend upon the applause or condemnation of the crowd.

Slingsby : (*meditatively blowing his cigar smoke towards the candelabra.*) I think it will be just as well to leave morality out of the question altogether. He's a clever man who knows what is moral, these days. Take that shipping transaction of yours, Sir Horace. . . .

Sir Horace (*nervously*) *:* I know ! I know ! It is, as you say, a difficult question.

Slingsby : Just you be wise. Give me your name, and plank down as many thousands as you choose. The better for you the more you put in.

Sir Horace : I should be more content if I knew who was going in besides.

Slingsby whispers to him.

Sir Horace : He's in ? It ought to be all right, then ?

Slingsby : It's as safe as the heavens, I tell you.

Sir Horace : And who's pulling the wires ?

Slingsby : The major part of that particular duty falls to your humble servant. The plans are made, the scheme is well laid. As a fact, we are on the point of making the final arrangements.

Sir Horace : And you really think you can take possession without causing trouble ?

Slingsby : Well, of course, there may be a little scrap or two, but we don't expect anything serious.

Sir Horace : But even a scrap would give the show away, and once the public got hold of it. . . .

Slingsby : Oh, yes ; but an official explanation would put everything right.

Sir Horace : Is H. all right ?

Slingsby : Quite. He wanted to know if you were coming in. Well, I must be off now, Sir Horace. I'm awfully glad you're coming in. I'll send down the documents as soon as they are ready. Ah, I love this sort of thing, you know. Apart altogether from the prize, there's the joy of pulling it off. Removing prejudices, overcoming opposition, persuading timid people to make a bold venture—and all that sort of thing—I simply love it !

He rises and goes towards the door.

Sir Horace : Now, above all things, avoid doing anything rash. Bargain if you possibly can ; it's much safer, and I believe more profitable in the long run.

Slingsby : Have no fears. The best course will be taken. Good-bye !

Sir Horace, after closing the door, shakes his head, and returns a little way into the room, reflecting : " He's a cute old rascal, Slingsby. One has either to take him or reject him. One can make nothing of his stories. Either he puts one in his pocket or severs all connections. It is terrible ! Now I wonder what will come of it all ! He is capable of anything, Slingsby—of using soldiers, exercising mild coercion, subjecting natives in the name of liberty ! Yes, he is capable of all that ! And how he closed me up when I raised the moral issue. Shocking ! Positively shocking ! One doesn't know where one is nowadays. Even here, one false step, and won't the devil have a jubilee ! And this is modern business . . what is called success ! Once I walked behind a plough. I've travelled far since then ; but it has been in a barren country, for the most part. Ah, no, it doesn't yield what the old country yielded. I wonder why it is called success ? I wonder !

Curtain.

SCENE III.

Some weeks later.

Scene : *A Street (before curtain, if desired).*

Enter Newsboy.

Newsboy : Evening paper, latest edition, Brenton Wood murder, mystery deepens ; British victory in Marrigoldland, hostile rebellion successfully suppressed, seventy native casualties, seven British. Evening pa——

Enter Minister.

Minister : What's that you say about Marrigoldland ?

Buys a paper.

Newsboy : British victory ! Seventy native casualties !

Minister : I see. How many British casualties ?

Newsboy : Seven.

Minister : Ha ! Those Heathens again ! There'll be no peace in the world till Heathenism has been wiped out.

Enter Stranger.

Stranger : What's this about a rebellion ?

Buys a paper.

Newsboy : Oh, it's the Heathens !

Stranger : Heathens ? What is a Heathen ?

Newsboy : I don't know. Ask the minister.

Minister : Now, come, my boy ; it's not so long since you were in a church, surely ! You've never heard the minister say that a Heathen is one who does not believe in God ?

Stranger : Yes, I suppose he would say that, but don't you think a better definition would be : One who does not believe in his fellow-man ? But, in any case, natives, as you call them, are ferocious believers in the Deity, whereas the majority of the white races don't care a tinker's curse about God, these days. Gold and power are the white man's gods, and how peace is going to come into the world by the acceptance on the part of native races of such gods, rather puzzles me. (*Turning to the boy.*) Where do you say the trouble is ?

Newsboy : Marrigoldland !

Stranger : Marrigoldland ! Oh, that sounds bad. Perhaps I ought to say it smells bad. Paraffin ! Ugh ! (*Turning to the minister.*) I suppose we've been protecting the natives, as usual ! It might seem that we have taught them the gentle arts of civilisation. At anyrate, they would appear to know how to kill.

Minister : (*to Boy.*) What is the cause of the trouble, do you know ?

Newsboy : No ! I don't read the papers : I only sells 'em.

Stranger : Wise boy ! There's some hope for your soul. (*Gives him money.*) When you shout again, say this : Seventy natives killed by the Heathen.

Newsboy : All right !

Exit Stranger.

Minister (*going off in the opposite direction, returns to the boy*)—Do you know who that man is ?

Newsboy : No ; who is he ?

Minister (*Ominously*) *:* He's a Bolshevik !

Newsboy (*Looking at the stranger's money.*) *:* Good sort, eh ?

Minister : Beware, my boy ! That man is on the straight road to hell !

Newsboy : Hard cheese ! That's where Uncle Sam says I'm goin.'

Minister : Beware, now ! (*He gives the lad a penny, and departs.*)

Newsboy (*Examines the penny, then puts it in his pocket. He hesitates, as if preoccupied, puts down his papers, takes off his cap and scratches his head ; he soliloquises.*): I can't make it all out. (*He counts on his fingers.*) (1) There's old Peter Popwell : he gies me sixpence every Saturday night—after 10. He's goin' to hell ! (2) There's Michael O'Brien : he gives me a black pudding every Friday. He's goin' to hell ! (3) Then there's this Bolshevik chap : he gies me threepence. And he's goin' to hell ! (4) And Uncle Sam says I'm goin' to hell ! The minister, he gies me a penny : I s'pose he's goin' to heaven ! Blimey (*picking up his papers*), if the devil ain't got all the best yins ! Evening paper : latest edition ! Brenton Wood murder ; mystery deepens. British victory in Marrigoldland : seventy natives killed by the Heathen ! Latest edition. . . .(*Departs*)

Curtain.

SCENE IV.

As Scene I. : Room in Mrs. Seldon's Cottage.

Mrs. Seldon is sitting alone, in the gloaming, before the fire. Her head is resting on one hand ; in the other she holds a white handkerchief, with which she occasionally dries her eyes. Presently someone knocks at the door.

Mrs. Seldon : Come in !

Mr. Melsop, the minister, enters.

Mr. Melsop : Is it true, Mrs. Seldon ?

Mrs. Seldon (Nods, then bursts into tears. After a moment, she points to the papers lying on the table.): You may look at them if you like.

Mr. Melsop : I am very sorry, Mrs. Seldon ! The path of duty is often very hard, and the ways of the Lord past finding out !

Mrs. Seldon : I'll never believe it was George's duty to go and kill anyone ; nor do I believe that it was God's will that he should go for a soldier.

Mr. Melsop : Yes, I know that has been your view from the first. And certainly it is a pity there should be any arms at all ; but in this imperfect world they would appear to be necessary.

Mrs. Seldon : No, I do not think so ! If people have arms they will use them. If one side is better armed than the other, that side will be arrogant. If neither side has arms, they will know that the only way to peace is to be reasonable. What were young lads, like George, doing with guns in Marrigoldland, amongst a people of whom they knew nothing ? What business had they to be there ? What were they doing ?

Mr. Melsop : I suppose they were defending British property. You see, there are very rich oil wells out there.

Mrs. Seldon : You mean that because there are rich oil wells, the land must, of course, belong to us ?

Mr. Melsop : Not at all. But I take it that we had some sort of a claim to them.

Mrs. Seldon : I'm inclined to believe we were just stealing them. Bob Lee—you know Bob ?—he says he can prove it ; he's going to bring me some newspaper cuttings. He's a member of some Society, or something, which goes into all these things.

Mr. Melsop : I think you would be well advised to think twice over what Bob tells you.

Mrs. Seldon : I don't know. Bob Lee knows a thing or two, and he's generally right, too. He opposed the war, and he and my husband had many a squabble over it. But Bob can show you a letter he got from my man before he was killed, in which my man confessed that he had been deceived, and that Bob was right. What right have we to go and take other people's property ?

Mr. Melsop : Some of the coloured races are very ferocious and revengeful.

Mrs. Seldon : Shouldn't we be, if someone came and tried to take possession of our richest lands ? I don't blame the natives for George's death. I blame those who sent him out there.

Mr. Melsop : These are big and intricate questions, beyond ordinary people like you and me ; so many things are involved of which we are ignorant.

Mrs. Seldon : Then you think we should give up our sons for cannon fodder without question, on demand, on the ground that we are ignorant ? Haven't we a right to ask for what purpose the lives of our children are to be sacrificed by the State ? What is this new god, the State, that we are not to question ? I believe my boy has been murdered, and I mean to find out. I am going to give my life henceforward to the abolition of this organised State murder. My boy's life is part of an unholy sacrifice made in the interest of stolen property. Who belongs to that property ?

Mr. Melop : I don't really know, Mrs. Seldon. I am ignorant of the details.

Mrs. Seldon : Do you think the Government belongs to it ? No. Those oil wells are owned by a number of privileged people—people blessed—or cursed—with titles, riches, or well-placed friends and relations. I know. And I'll know more yet. I want to know who has murdered my son.

Mr. Melsop : You must try and keep calm, Mrs. Seldon, otherwise you might be carried off your feet and tempted to seek revenge.

Mrs. Seldon : No, never ! Revenge has no sweetness for me, Mr. Melsop. I have loved my husband and my son too well to spoil their memory by revenge. Just because I have loved them I am going to work for the cessation of a system of society which makes such barbarous sacrifices necessary. My husband was murdered in the Great War, and who benefited from that but the rich and mighty ? Now my son has been murdered, and, as it would seem, to enrich a few oil magnates. Yet neither father nor son desired to go into the army. Both were driven there, the one by Conscription, the other by unem-

ployment. I shall never be able to forgive myself for my boy's death. My husband charged me above all things to save George from such a fate as his, to keep him out of the army by all means. But I waited too long; I didn't realise the danger; I thought that such things were far from his mind. But, alas! Yet he was a good boy, and hated the very thought of going into the army; but he could not bear to be idle and dependent, especially to be dependent upon his widowed mother. The wages of the father's sacrifice was unemployment for the son, and, finally, that son's sacrifice. And all the while the rich flourish, and the mighty sit securely in their seats.

Enter Ada.

Ada: Mother, has our George (*on seeing the minister she hesitates, and creeps up to her mother*). Mother, Ethel Taylor says our George has been killed. He hasn't, has he?

Mrs. Seldon draws the child nearer to her, and sobs.

Ada: Has he, mother?

Mrs. Seldon: Yes, darling.

Ada: Where? Who killed him?

Mr. Melsop: There has been a war, and George is one of those who have been killed.

Mrs. Seldon: England has murdered him, Ada.

Ada: England?

Mrs. Seldon: Yes, child. I'll teach you how, some day, because I want you to live for a pure and noble England, an England which no longer sells its soul for power, its sons for gain. That England will come as soon as the people see what I have lately been brought to see—the sordid circumstances out of which the horrors of war arise.

Mr. Melsop: God speed your efforts, Mrs. Seldon. I fear we have all much to learn.

Mrs. Seldon: It is easy to learn when we desire the truth and are not in bondage to our prejudices.

Mr. Melsop: You speak truly. Wouldn't you like me to fill up these forms for you?

Mrs. Seldon: Thank you, Mr. Melsop. It is very good of you. All the same I would like to be able to snap my fingers at the whole dirty business. To accept a pension, in a case of this kind, seems to me almost like entering into a bargain with treason and murder.

Mr. Melsop writes at the table.

Ada: Mother, won't George ever come back again?

Mrs. Seldon: No, darling. (*Presses her daughter tightly to her and sobs*).

Curtain.

SCENE V.

As Scene II.: A Corner of Sir Horace Blenkins' Drawing-Room.

Sir Horace Blenkins and Mr. Slingsby in lively conversation.

Mr. Slingsby: Well, although I say it myself, the whole thing has gone through in magnificent style.

Sir Horace: Oh, I never doubted your cleverness, Slingsby.

Mr. Slingsby: No, but you've been a doubting Thomas in this affair from the very first, Sir Horace. I've had to carry you every inch of the way, as you know.

Sir Horace: I must confess I've had my misgivings. Even now I am not too sure that we're out of the wood.

Mr. Slingsby: Out of the wood? Nonsense, Sir Horace. Why, the thing is an accomplished fact, and although the situation was rather critical a few days ago, I think the worst is over. Fortunately, too, the affair has scarcely raised a single inquiry. Of course, we chose our people with great care. As for the results —I suppose you have seen this morning's paper? The shares are up another 15s. They stand now at £5 10s., which isn't bad for a £1 share. That means something like a quarter of a million in your pocket already, Sir Horace. You've cause to be cheerful, old chap!

Sir Horace: Pray don't think I am unmindful of all your help. I am indebted to you beyond measure, for infinitely more than I shall be able ever to repay you. More than that, I admire your genius and self-confidence tremendously.

Mr. Slingsby: Thanks, awfully. But I may as well confess that I thoroughly enjoy carrying through little schemes of this kind. I love intrigue, rubbing shoulders with fussy fogies and stolid officials on the backstairs, getting big things done by touching little screws and buttons, as it were, I sometimes think that money is to politics what electricity is to industry. It is that which makes the wheels go round. But what is the matter with you, Sir Horace? With all your good fortune, you can scarcely raise a smile. Why the devil won't you be happy?

Sir Horace: And why do you persist in worrying about me? Well, to be candid, I must confess to being a little uneasy. Supposing the truth were to leak out after all?

Mr. Slingsby : Nothing short of a miracle could cause that to happen.

Sir Horace : Unfortunately miracles do sometimes happen. And were one to happen on this occasion—where should we be ?

Mr. Slingsby : What is it that is troubling you ?

Sir Horace : The price that has been paid.

Mr. Slingsby : The price ? Why, it has been done for an old song. Of course, you don't expect to pull things of this sort off for less than a few thousands.

Sir Horace : I wasn't thinking of the money. I was thinking of the lives !

Mr. Slingsby : Those seventy niggers ?

Sir Horace : Not niggers, Slingsby, let me assure you ; but human beings like you and me. Besides, there were some British.

Mr. Slingsby : Only seven.

Sir Horace : Still, seven ! Seven human beings who, no doubt, were as fond of life as you or I.

Mr. Slingsby : Every venture has its risks. And considering what has been gained—a—a—besides the men joined the army voluntarily, I suppose ?

Sir Horace : I suppose they did. But I don't think they joined it with the idea of going out to appropriate property for our special benefit ! And that is what they have been used for.

Mr. Slingsby : They have helped to bring that land into use.

Sir Horace : Our concern was dividends : let us be frank. If the use of the oil wells was all we had been concerned about, we could easily have secured the co-operation of the natives for such an end.

Mr. Slingsby : But why rake up all these things after the event ?

Sir Horace : I am very sorry to do so, but, as you know, I have been uneasy from the first. I am afraid I have been shaken a little, of late, at certain things that have happened. I can go a good way, but there is a point beyond which——

A knock. A servant enters.

Servant : A lady here, sir. She wants you to sign a pensions paper.

Sir Horace : Is that all ?

Servant : Yes, sir.

Sir Horace : Then show her in. I'll do it here.

Enter Mrs. Seldon.

Mrs. Seldon : Good evening, sir ! I have a form here which must be signed by a magistrate. Will you be so good ?

Sir Horace : Certainly. Take a seat. (*He glances down the form*). Oh, I see ; your son. He was in the army. What has happened, then ? Not killed, I hope ?

Mrs. Seldon : No, murdered.

Sir Horace : Murdered ? You don't mean to say ? How did it happen ? (*He reads further.*) Marrigoldland ! He was out there ? And he was murdered out there ?

Mrs. Seldon : Yes.

Slingsby pricks his ears.

Sir Horace : By the natives ?

Mrs. Seldon : No, by Britain. I understand he was helping to steal some land for an Oil Syndicate, here. It is they who have murdered him—they and their accomplices. He did not want to join the army, but unemployment drove him to it. They took my husband into the Great War : he did not return. Now they have taken my only son : he will never return. What is the result ? Broken homes and broken hearts, desolation and despair. Modern wars are the crucifixion of the meek for the preservation of the mighty.

Slingsby rises and steps back into the shade.

Sir Horace : It is certainly true what you say : that war is a horrible business. But somehow or other we do not seem able to get along without it. We must really find a way out.

Mrs. Seldon : The people have got their eye on one which promises to be effective.

Sir Horace : Indeed ? What is that, Mrs. Seldon ?

Mrs. Seldon : Oh, just refusing to fight. It's the only way.

Sir Horace : But if we refuse to fight, I'm afraid we shall get badly sat on.

Mrs. Seldon : Don't you consider that I and people like me have been pretty badly sat on ? And have we increased or diminished the chances of war by sending out soldiers to Marrigoldland, and killing seventy natives ? Always, in peace or war, the common people of all lands suffer together. With whom am I most closely related, the wives and mothers of those seventy natives, or the Syndicate whose sole aim was to secure oil wells ? The latter will reap their profits : the former have lost husbands and sons.

Slingsby watches intently.

Sir Horace : It is horrible ! Horrible ! We don't realise what we are doing. (*writes.*)

Mrs. Seldon (*Quietly, as if speaking to herself.*) *:* The poor man steals, and is put in prison ; he murders another for gold, and is hung. The rich man steals, and is pronounced clever ; he organises murder, and is called a patriot ; he profits by that

murder and is raised to nobility! To what depths, O England, hast thou sunk? (*A slight pause. Then, louder, looking beyond, forgetful, as in a dream.*) But a new England shall arise. Out of the bowels of the unspoiled poor shall it come—as a city built in a night. Truth shall enlighten it, honour ennoble it, love sweeten it, service glorify it. Purged be this land of all its fashionable filth—this sordid greed of gold, this devilish warfare, this brutal bartering in human flesh! Our bones are dried up. A new ideal and a new hope shall enliven them. Breathe upon them, ye four winds of heaven, that they again may live! And let this valley of dry bones be a kingdom of men mighty in its freedom, noble in its service, and beloved of the nations because it first dares to love.

Stands with outstretched arms.

Curtain.

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